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# NATHANAEL GREENE.

AN

EXAMINATION OF SOME STATEMENTS CONCERNING MAJOR-GENERAL GREENE, IN THE NINTH VOLUME OF BANCROFT'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES.

BY

GEORGE WASHINGTON GREENE,

AUTHOR OF "HISTORICAL VIEW OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION," ETC., ETC.

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BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.
1866.

GREENE IV

"From you who knew and loved him, I fear not the imputation of flattery or enthusiasm when I indulge an expectation that the *name* of GREENE will at once awaken in your mind the images of whatever is noble and estimable in human nature. . . . . As a man, the virtues of Greene are admitted; as a patriot, he holds a place in the foremost rank; as a statesman, he is praised; as a soldier, he is admired. But in the two last characters, especially in the last but one, his reputation falls far below his desert. It required a longer life, and still greater opportunities, to have enabled him to exhibit, in full day, the vast, I had almost said the enormous, powers of his mind. . . . . The sudden termination of his life cut him off from those scenes which the progress of a new, immense, and unsettled empire could not fail to open to the complete exertion of that universal and pervading genius which qualified him not less for the senate than for the field.

"In forming our estimate, nevertheless, of his character, we are not left to supposition and conjecture. . . . . We have a succession of deeds, as glorious as they are unequivocal, to attest his greatness and perpetuate the honors of his name. . . . . He was not long there [the camp at Cambridge] before the discerning eye of the American Fabius marked him out as the object of his confidence. . . . . His abilities entitled him to a pre-eminent share in the councils of his chief. He gained it, and he preserved it amidst all the *checkered varieties* of military vicissitude, and in defiance of all the intrigues of jealous and aspiring rivals." — Alexander Hamilton's *Eulogium on Major-General Greene.* Delivered before the Society of the Cincinnati, July 4, 1789.

When we call to mind who the members of the Cincinnati were, and remember that, but for illness, Washington himself would have been present as their head, when this discourse was delivered, we shall see that it passes from the equivocal class of eulogies to the higher class of historical authorities.

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# PREFACE.

Mr. Bancroft's last volume, covering the history of the War of Independence from the summer of 1776 to the spring of 1778, contains statements concerning General Greene which I believe to be at variance, both in the spirit and in the letter, with all the contemporary historians, and with all those documents from whence authentic history is drawn. I cannot allow them to pass without contradiction.

Questions like these can only be decided by an appeal to the original documents, and to the original documents I appeal. First among them are the letters of Washington; in using which I have chiefly relied upon the judicious selection of Mr. Sparks. Next to these in importance, and equal to them in authenticity, are the letters of General Greene; some of which have been published by Force in his great national monument, the American Archives, and some by Sparks in the "Correspondence of the Revolution." By far the greater part, however, unfortunately for the true understanding of this

period of our history, are still in manuscript. After these come the contemporary historians of the war, of whom Gordon is the fullest, and in general the most trustworthy. No man ever had better opportunities of ascertaining the truth than he, nor, as I believe, a stronger desire to tell it. He formed the plan of his history at the first breaking out of the war, collected his materials while it was going on, had access to the papers of the leading characters, and took great pains to establish the truth both by oral and written inquiry. I have many letters of his to General Greene containing questions concerning particular events, and some of General Greene's answers. A single extract will show the character of these inquiries.

"Jamaica Plains, April 5, 1784.

"Dear General: —

". . . . I have a grateful sense of your kindness when I was at Newport, and that I believe in your professions shall convince you by these presents.

"Pray you to inform me, —

"Who accompanied you when reconnoitring for a position upon the landing of General Howe?

"How far the cross-roads were from him?

"What was the name of the place the army occupied at the back of Wilmington?

"What was the particular spot you would have

chosen on the other side of the Schuylkill, instead of crossing it, in hopes that General Howe would have fought you ere he attempted passing it and going on for Philadelphia?"

Similar letters of this indefatigable inquirer are found among the Washington papers, and it is well known that he was a correspondent of Gates also. That he had his prejudices cannot be denied; nor that they sometimes led him into error: but that he industriously sought the truth even Mr. Bancroft has conceded; although he has so boldly differed from him in all that relates to General Greene. Upon what authority he relies, in thus denying the authority of Gordon, he nowhere tells us.

In publishing Greene's letters I have given them in full, that the reader might have no ground to suspect me of selecting only what told for my cause. And I have done this all the more freely, inasmuch as it affords Greene an opportunity of painting himself. Every stroke of his pen, if I do not greatly err, is a triumphant, although an unconscious, vindication from the aspersions which Mr. Bancroft has cast upon his name.

Frederick the Great was once told that a distinguished general had never made a mistake. "Then," said he, "he must have fought very few campaigns." That Greene made some mistakes I have no doubt; nor that Washington made some. No one will

accuse me of undervaluing Greene. Should any one suspect me of wishing to defend him at Washington's expense, I would refer to the opinion of Washington, both as a statesman and as a general, which I have expressed in my "Historical View of the American Revolution." No writer, as far as I have seen, has placed him higher than I have done in the eighth lecture of that volume.

GEORGE WASHINGTON GREENE.

East Greenwich, R. I., Nov. 21, 1866.

# NATHANAEL GREENE.

"It is not the least debt which we owe to history," says Sir Walter Raleigh, "that it hath made us acquainted with our dead ancestors, and out of the depth and darkness of the earth delivered us their memory and fame." Deeply impressed with this truth, I purpose to examine the statements which Mr. Bancroft makes in his ninth volume concerning my ancestor, General Greene; still bearing in mind that "the essence of history is to be true, .... the essence of political history is to be a register or record, including nothing false, and omitting nothing important with reference to its end." *

## I. Greene despondent.

Gathering the substance of his chapters into an analytical table of contents, Mr. Bancroft writes, in the analysis of his first chapter, "*Greene despondent.*" On turning to the page (40) I find: "Greene had once before warned John Adams of the hopelessness of the contest; and again on the fourteenth he wrote, 'I still think you are playing a desperate game.'"

* Lewis on the Methods of Observation and Reasoning in Politics, Ch. VII. §§ 1 – 25.

The nature and extent of Greene's despondency may be gathered from the three letters to which Mr. Bancroft, not citing, but probably drawing from, Mr. Charles Francis Adams's life of his grandfather, John Adams, alludes. But before we pass to these letters, I must call the reader's attention to the meaning of the word *desperate*, which Mr. Bancroft, deviating from the sounder modes of historical quotation, has transformed into *hopelessness*.

It can hardly be necessary to remind the reader of the rank held by Middleton among the writers of the last century as a master of pure and idiomatic English.* What he means by *desperate* may be seen from the following passage — I could add a dozen — in his "Life of Cicero": "The obscurity of his extraction, which depressed him with the nobility, made him the greater favorite with the people, who, on all occasions of danger, thought him the only man fit to be trusted with their lives and fortunes, or to have the command of a difficult and *desperate* war; and, in truth, he twice delivered them from the most *desperate* with which they had ever been threatened by a foreign enemy."† It is evident that in both these passages *desperate* means, not *hopeless*, but *exceedingly difficult*. In this sense Washington also uses it, in a letter quoted by Mr. Bancroft, p. 220,—"Desperate diseases require desperate remedies." And that this is the sense in which Greene uses it in the letters so inadequately represented by this insulated

* "Middleton," says Dugald Stewart in his Life of Robertson, "was recommended to Scotchmen as the safest model for their imitation." — STEWART'S Works, Vol. VII. p. 169.

† Vol. I. p. 27.

sentence, is evident from the firm and resolute tone which runs through them from beginning to end. One more remark before I pass to them. They were addressed to Adams, not as a personal friend, but as a member of Congress, upon whose sanguine mind Greene sought to impress the difficulties of the contest, and the danger of trusting to intentions and resolves.

"Brookline, Long Island, May 24, 1776.

"Sir: — The peculiar situation of American affairs renders it necessary to adopt every measure that will engage people in the service, — the danger and hardships that those are subject to who engage in the service more than those who do not, is obvious to everybody which has the least acquaintance with service. 'T is that which makes it so difficult to recruit. The large force which is coming against America will make it necessary to augment our forces. If I am to form a judgment of the success of recruiting from what is past, the time is too short to raise the troops, and be in readiness to meet the enemy; and as every argument has been made use of upon the present plan of recruiting to engage people in the service, there must be some new motives added to quicken the motions of the recruiting parties.

"From the approaching danger, recruiting will grow more and more difficult. If the Congress was to fix a certain support upon every officer and soldier that got maimed in the service, or upon the families of those that were killed, it would have as

happy an influence towards engaging people in the service, and inspire those engaged with as much courage, as any measure that can be fixt upon. I think it is nothing more than common justice, neither, — it puts those in and out of the army upon a more equal footing than at present. I have not time to add anything more, — Major Frazier now waiting for this. The desperate game you have got to play, and the uncertainty of war, may render every measure that will increase the force and strength of the American army worthy consideration. When I have more leisure time, I will presume so much upon your good nature as to write upon some other matters. Believe me to be, with great respect, yours.

"NATHANAEL GREENE."

It is difficult to discover any traces of despondency in this letter; but it certainly displays a very just sense of the dangers of the situation, and a very wise and statesmanlike suggestion of the remedy. Let us see what he writes from

"CAMP ON LONG ISLAND, June 2, 1776.

"SIR: — I have just received your favor of the 26th of May, in answer to mine of the 24th. You must not expect me to be a very exact correspondent; my circumstances will not always admit of it. When I have opportunity I will write you with freedom. If any information I can give you should be of service, I shall be amply paid. I know your time is too precious to be spent in answering letters; but

a line from you at all times will be very acceptable, with such intelligence as you are at liberty to give.

"By your letter I have the happiness to find you agree with me in sentiment, for the establishing a support for those that get disabled in the army or militia; but I am sorry to find, at the same time, that you are very doubtful of its taking effect. I could wish the Congress to think seriously of the matter, both with respect to the justice and utility of the measure. Is it not inhuman to suffer those that have fought nobly in the cause to be reduced to the necessity of getting a support by common charity? Does not this militate with the free and independent principles which we are endeavoring to support? Is it not equitable that the State who receives the benefit should be at the expense? The community, collectively considered, pays nothing more for the establishing a support than if they do not; for those that get disabled must be supported by the continent in general, or the province in particular. If the continent establishes no support, by the fate of war some colonies might be grievously burthened. I cannot see upon what principle any *colony* can encourage the inhabitants to engage in the army when the *State* that employs them refuses a support to the unfortunate. I think it would be right and just for every government to furnish their equal proportion of the troops, or contribute to the support of those that are sent by other colonies.

"Can there be anything more humiliating than this consideration to those that are in the army or to those

that have a mind to come in it? — If I meet with a misfortune I shall be reduced to the necessity of begging my bread. Is not this degrading and distressing a part of the human species that deserves a better fate? On the other hand, if there was a support established, what confidence would it give to those engaged, what encouragement to those that are not. Good policy points out the measure; humanity calls for it; and justice claims it at your hands.

"I apprehend the dispute to be but in its infancy: nothing should be neglected to encourage people to engage, or to render those easy, contented, and happy that are engaged. Good covering is an object of the first consideration. I know of nothing that is more discouraging than the want of it: it renders the troops very uncomfortable and generally unhealthy. A few troops well accommodated, healthy and spirited, will do more service to the state that employs them, than a much larger number that are sickly, dispirited, and discontented. This is the unhappy state of the army at this time, arising from the badness of the tents. His Excellency has ordered everything to be done to remedy the evil that is in his power, but before the remedy can take place the health of the troops will receive a severe wound.

"From the nature of the dispute, and the manner of furnishing the State with troops, too much care cannot be taken of those that engage, otherwise some particular governments more public-spirited than others, may be depopulated.

"Good officers is the very soul of an army; the activity and zeal of the troops entirely depends upon the degree of animation given them by their officers. I think it was Sir William Pitt's maxim to pay well and hang well to have a good army. The field officers in general, and the colonels of regiments in particular, think themselves grievously burthened upon the present establishment: few, if any, of that rank that are worth retaining in service will continue if any dependence is to be made upon the discontent that appears. They say — and I believe with too much truth — that their pay and provision will not defray their expenses. Another great grievance they complain on is, they are obliged to act as factors for the regiment: subject to many losses without any extraordinary allowance for their trouble: drawing from the continental stores by wholesale, and delivering out to the troops by retail. This business has been attended with much perplexity, and accompanied with very great losses where the colonels have not been good accountants. This is no part of the duty of the colonel of a regiment, and by the mode in which the business has been conducted, too much of their time has been engaged in that employment for the good of the service. There should be an agent with each regiment to provide the troops with clothing on the easiest terms, allowed to draw money for that purpose occasionally, to be stopped out of the pay abstract. Those agents could provide seasonably, fetch their goods from a distance, and prevent those local impositions that arises from every reverse of the army.

"The dispute begins to be reduced to a national principle, and the longer it continues the more that idea will prevail. People engaged in the service in the early part of the dispute without any consideration of pay reward; few, if any, thought of its continuance; but its duration will reduce all that have not independent fortunes to attend to their family concerns. And if the present pay of those in the service is insufficient for the support of them and their families, they must consequently quit it. The novelty of the army may engage others, but you cannot imagine the injury the army sustains by the loss of every good officer. A young officer without any experience in the military art or knowledge of mankind, unless he has a very uncommon genius must be totally unfit to command a regiment.

"I observe in the Resolves of Congress they have reserved to themselves the right of rewarding by promotion according to merit; the reserve may be right, but the exercise will be dangerous, often injurious, and sometimes very unjust. (Of) two persons of very unequal merit, the inferior may get promoted over the superior, if a single instance of bravery is a sufficient reason for such a promotion. There is no doubt but that it's right and just to reward singular merit, but the public applause accompanying every brave action is a noble reward.

"Where one officer is promoted over the head of another, if he has spirit enough to be fit for service it lays him under the necessity of quitting it. It is a public intimation that he is unfit for promotion, and consequently undeserving his present appoint-

ment. For my own part I would never give any legislative body an opportunity to humiliate me but once. I should think the general's recommendation is necessary to warrant a promotion out of the regular channel. For rank is of such importance in the army, and so delicate are the sentiments respecting it, that very strong reasons ought to be given for going out of the proper channel, or else it will not be satisfactory to the army in general, or to the party in particular.

"The emission of such large sums of money increases the price in proportion to the sums emitted; the money has but a nominal value. The evil does not arise from a depreciation altogether but from there being larger sums emitted than is necessary for a circulating medium. If the evil increases it will starve the army, for the pay of the troops at the prices things are sold at will scarcely keep the troops decently clothed. Notwithstanding what I write I will engage to keep the troops under my command as easy and contented as any in the army.

"I observe you don't think the game you are playing as desperate as I imagine. You doubtless are much better acquainted with the resources that are to be had in case of any misfortune than I am; but I flatter myself I know the history, strength and state of the army almost as well as any in it, both with respect to the goodness of the troops and the abilities of the officers. Don't be too confident: the fate of war is very uncertain: little incidents has given rise to great events. Suppose this army should be defeated, two or three of the leading Generals

killed, our stores and magazines all lost, I would not be answerable for the consequences that such a stroke might produce in American politics. You think the present army assisted by the militia is sufficient to oppose the force of Great Britain, formidable as it appears on paper. I can assure you it's necessary to make great allowances in the calculation of our strength from the establishment or else you'll be greatly deceived. I am confident the force of America, if properly exerted, will prove superior to all her enemies, but I would risk nothing to chance; it is easy to disband when it is impossible to raise troops.

"I approve your plan of encouraging our own troops rather than reducing theirs: let us fight and beat them fairly and free our country from oppression without departing from the principles of honor, truth, or justice. The conditions you propose are very honorable, but I fear whether they are altogether equal to the emergency of the times, for mankind being much more influenced by present profit than remote advantages, people will consider what benefit they are immediately to receive, and take their resolutions accordingly.

"If the force of Great Britain should prove near equal to what it has been represented, a large augmentation will be necessary; if the present offers should not be sufficient to induce people to engage in the army you will be obliged to augment the army; and perhaps at a time when that order of people will have it in their power to make their own conditions or distress the state.

"As I have wrote a great deal and the Doctor waiting, I shall add no more, only my hearty wishes for your health and happiness. Believe me to be with great esteem your most obedient and humble servant,

"N. GREENE."

Eleven days after this letter was written, John Adams was appointed President of the Board of War. On the 14th of July, Greene again writes him: —

"CAMP ON LONG ISLAND, July 14, 1776.

"DEAR SIR: — I received your letter of the 22d of June: if it was necessary for you to apologize for not writing sooner, it is necessary also for me. But as the express condition of my corresponding with you was to write when I had time and leave you to answer at your leisure, I think an apology is unnecessary on either side. But I can assure you, as you did me, that it is not for want of respect that your letter has been unanswered so long.

"I am glad to find you agree with me in the justice and propriety of establishing some provision for the unfortunate. I have not had time to fix upon any plan for that purpose, but I will write you more fully in my next. I have never mentioned the matter to but one or two particular friends, for fear the establishment should not take place. The troops' expectations being once raised, a disappointment must necessarily sour them. On the other hand, if Congress established a support for the unfortunate unsolicited, it must inspire the army with love and

gratitude towards the Congress for so generous an act.

"You query whether there is not a want of economy in the army among the officers. I can assure you there is not among those of my acquaintance. The expenses of the officers runs very high, unless they dress, and live below the gentleman. Few that have ever lived in character will be willing to descend to that. As long as they continue in service they will support their rank; and if their pay is not sufficient they will draw on their private fortunes at home. The pay of the soldiers will scarcely keep them decently clothed. The troops are kept so much on fatigue that they wear out their clothing as fast as the officers can get it. The wages given to common soldiers is very high; but everything is so dear that the purchase of a few articles takes their whole pay. This is a general complaint through the whole army.

"I am not against rewarding merit, or encouraging activity; neither would I have promotions confined to a regular line of succession; but every man that has spirit enough to be fit for an officer will have too much to continue in service after another of inferior rank is put over his head. The power of rewarding merit should be lodged with the Congress; but I should think the general's recommendation is the best testimonial of a person's deserving a reward that the Congress can have.

"Many of the New England colonels have let in a jealousy that the Southern officers of that rank in the Continental establishment are treated with more

respect and attention by the Congress than they are. They say several of the Southern colonels have been promoted to the rank of brigadier-general, but not one New England colonel. Some of them appear not a little disgusted. I wish the officers in general were as studious to deserve promotion as they are anxious to obtain it.

"You cannot more sincerely lament the want of knowledge to execute the business that falls in your department than I do that which falls in mine; and was I not kept in countenance by some of my superior officers" (Greene was yet only a brigadier), "I should be sincerely disposed to quit the command I hold in the army. But I will endeavor to supply the want of knowledge as much as possible by watchfulness and industry. In these respects I flatter myself I have never been faulty. I have never been one moment out of the service since I engaged in it. My interest has and will suffer greatly by my absence; but I shall think that a small sacrifice if I can save my country from slavery.

"You have heard, long before this will reach you, of the arrival of General and Admiral Howe. The General's troops are encamped on Staten Island. The Admiral arrived on Friday last. A few hours before his arrival, two ships went up the North River amidst a most terrible fire from the different batteries. The Admiral sent up a flag to-day; but as the letter was not properly addressed it was not received. The Admiral laments his not arriving a few days sooner. I suppose he alludes to the Declaration of Independence. It is said he has great powers to treat, as well as a strong army to execute.

"I wrote you some time past I thought you were playing a desperate game. I still think so. Here is Howe's army arrived, and the reinforcements hourly expected.

"The whole force we have to oppose them don't amount to much above nine thousand, if any. I could wish the troops had been drawn together a little earlier, that we might have had some opportunity of disciplining them. However, what falls to my lot I shall endeavor to execute to the best of my ability.

"I am, with the greatest respect, your most obedient humble servan

"NATH. GREENE."

On September 28th, after the battle of Long Island, and the retreat from New York, he writes a brother: — "I apprehend the several retreats that have lately taken place begin to make you think all is lost. Don't be frightened; our cause is not yet in a desperate state. The policy of Congress has been the most absurd and ridiculous imaginable, pouring in militia-men, who come and go every month. A military force established upon such principles defeats itself. People coming from home, with all the tender feelings of domestic life, are not sufficiently fortified with natural courage to stand the shocking scenes of war. To march over dead men, to hear without concern the groanings of the wounded, — I say few men can stand such scenes, unless steeled by habit or fortified by military pride.

"There must be a good army established; men

engaged for the war, a proper corps of officers, and then, after a proper time to discipline the men, everything is to be expected.

"The Congress goes upon a penurious plan. The present pay of the officers will not support them, and it is generally determined by the best officers to quit the service unless a more adequate provision is made for their support. The present establishment is not thought reputable.

"The Congress has never furnished the number of men voted by near one half, certainly by above a third. Had we had numbers we need not have retreated from Long Island or New York. But the extent of ground to guard rendered the retreat necessary; otherwise the army would have been ruined by detachments. The enemy never could have driven us from Long Island and New York, if our rear had been secured. We must have an army to meet the enemy everywhere; to act offensively as well as defensively. Our soldiers are as good as ever were, and were the officers half as good as the men, they would beat any army on the globe of equal numbers."

These letters need no comment. How far, if indeed it be an office of history to record the growth of controlling ideas, the history of this period is correctly represented by Mr. Bancroft's "Greene had once before warned John Adams of the *hopelessness* of the contest; and again on the fourteenth he wrote, 'I still think you are playing a desperate game,'" — I leave to the reader to determine. Had

an illustration of the anxiety with which thoughtful men looked forward to the menacing future of this decisive year been required, a still more striking illustration might have been found in Washington's letter of December 18th, to his brother. "In a word, if every nerve is not strained to recruit the new army with all possible expedition, *the game is nearly up*." Three days after these words were written Greene was writing to Governor Cooke of Rhode Island, "I think, notwithstanding the general disaffection of a certain order of people, the army will fill up; if that be the case, nothing is to be feared."

I cannot envy the filial heart or the historic eye that should find in these words a proof that, while Greene was full of hope, Washington despaired.

II. Did Greene "reflect" upon Washington?

It is no part of my duty to discuss the question of Washington's demeanor at Kip's Bay, however doubtful I may feel of the success of Mr. Bancroft's effort to reduce the violent outbreak of Washington's violent passions to a calm resolve "to shame or inspirit his men by setting them an example of desperate courage." Nor should I have alluded to it if he had not taken occasion to make it the opportunity of an injurious insinuation against Greene. "Greene's words are," he says in the note on pages 122, 123, "Fellows's and Parsons's whole brigade ran away from about fifty men, and left his Excellency on the ground within eighty yards of the enemy, and so vexed at the infamous conduct of the troops, that he sought death rather than life."

"The embellishments of the narrative," says Mr. Bancroft, "which have been gradually wrought out till they have become self-contradictory and ludicrous, may be traced to the camp. A bitter and jealous rivalry, which the adjutant-general had assisted to foment, had grown up between the New England troops and those south of New England. Northern men very naturally found excuses for their brethren, and may have thought that Washington censured them too severely; but while I have had in my hands very many contemporary letters written by New-Englanders on the events of this campaign, I have never found in any one of them the least reflection on Washington for his conduct in the field during any part of this day, unless the words of Greene are to be so interpreted."

By what principle of interpretation they could be so wrested from their evident meaning it is difficult to see; or even why such a conjecture should have been introduced except to cast a doubt upon Greene's love and reverence for Washington. That Washington's temper was violent no one who has come to the study of his history with an earnest love of truth will deny. It will be time enough to blame him for a gift of nature, when it can be shown that he ever, either as general or as president, permitted it to lead him to a hasty or an inconsiderate act.

### III. Expedition against Staten Island.

Continuing my examination, I find on page 176: "In the following night, Mercer, at first accompanied

by Greene, made a descent upon Staten Island." If it was necessary to mention Greene at all in this connection, would it not have been fair to add, that the reason of his not following up the expedition in person was a sudden summons to head-quarters at Harlem? "On the night of the 15th," writes Mercer on the 17th of October, 1776, to the President of Congress,* "General Greene passed over with me to Staten Island, with part of the troops at this post. . . . . Orders from General Washington arrived at eleven at night which made it necessary for General Greene to repair immediately to Harlem."

## IV. Greene's Illusions and Murmurs.

On page 180 I read: "Lasher on the next day obeyed orders sent from Washington's camp to quit Fort Independence, which was insulated and must have fallen before any considerable attack; but Greene, under the *illusions of inexperience, complained* of the evacuation as premature and likely to damp the spirits of his troops, and wrote murmuringly to Washington that "the fort might have kept the enemy at bay for several days." That the reader may have an opportunity of forming his own opinion of the nature of Greene's "illusions" and the tone of his "murmurs," I give the letter in full. He may, perhaps, be surprised to find that it contains no allusion to "the spirits of his (Greene's) troops," which, from Mr. Bancroft's mode of expression, he would, perhaps, have expected to find there. It occurs in a letter to Mifflin, as we shall see by and by, and be

* Force, American Archives, Ser. V. Ch. II. 1093.

able to judge how far it is a complaint, and how far a just apprehension.

"Fort Lee, October 29, 1776.

"Dear Sir: — Colonel Lasher burnt the barracks yesterday morning at three o'clock; he left all the cannon in the fort. I went out to examine the ground, and found between two and three hundred stand of small arms (that were out of repair) about two miles beyond King's Bridge; a great number of spears, shot, shell, &c., too numerous to mention. I directed all the wagons on the other side to be employed in getting the stores away, and expect to get it completed this morning. I forgot to mention five tons of bar iron that was left. I am sorry the barracks were not left standing a few days longer; it would have given us an opportunity to have got off some of the boards.

"I think that Fort Independence might have kept the enemy at bay for several days, but the troops here and on the other side are so much fatigued that it must have been a work of time.

"Colonel Magaw showed me a letter from Colonel Reed, ordering the Rangers to march and join the army. Major Coburn was wounded in the Sunday action. Colonel Magaw says the Rangers are the only security to his lines. By keeping out constant patrols, their acquaintance with the ground enables them to discover the enemy's motions in every quarter. The Colonel petitions very hard for their stay. I told him I would send an express to learn your Excellency's further pleasure. The Colonel thinks

if the Rangers leave him he must draw the garrison in from the lines. That would be a pity, as the redoubt is not yet in any great forwardness. From the Sunday affair, I am more fully convinced that we can prevent any ships from stopping the communication.

"I have forwarded eighty thousand musket cartridges more under the care of a subaltern's guard, commanded by Lieutenant Pembleton of Colonel Ralling's (Rawlings) regiment.

"This moment heard of the action of yesterday" (battle of White Plains). "Can learn no particulars. God grant you protection and success. Colonel Crawford says he expects the action to be renewed this morning. I hope to be commanded wherever I can be the most useful.

"I am, dear General, your most obedient and very humble servant,

"N. Greene."

## V. Fort Washington.

The eleventh chapter is devoted to Fort Washington. The table of contents says, "Infatuation of Greene, 185 — Clear judgment of Washington, 185 — His instructions to Greene, 185 — Orders to prepare for evacuating Fort Lee, 186 — Greene disregards Washington's intentions, 188 — Grief of Washington, 189 — Want of vigilance in Greene, 189 —Disingenuousness of Greene, 193 — Magnanimity of Washington, 193."

To this formidable array of accusations the text fully corresponds. "Greene, whose command now ex-

tended to that fort (Washington), had not *scrupled* to increase its garrison by sending over between two and three hundred men," p. 184. "On the last day of October Greene, who was as blindly confident as Putnam, wrote to Washington for instructions; but without waiting for them, he again reinforced Magaw with the rifle regiment of Rawlings," 184. "Greene was possessed with the same infatuation," 185. "Greene framed his measures on a system directly contrary to Washington's manifested intentions," 187, 188. "Before the end of the thirteenth Washington arrived at Fort Lee, and to his great grief found what Greene had done..... Greene, his best and most trusted officer, and the commander of the post, insisted that the evacuation was uncalled for, but would be attended with *disastrous* consequences," 188. "On the night following the fourteenth the vigilance of Greene so far slumbered that thirty flat-boats of the British passed his fort undiscovered," 189. "Greene, who was persuaded that he had sent over men 'enough to defend themselves against the whole British army,'" 189. "Greene would never assume his share of responsibility for the disaster, and would never confess his glaring errors of judgment; but wrongfully ascribed the defeat to a panic which had struck the men so 'that they fell a prey to their own fears,'" 193.

Whether Greene was right or wrong in his belief that Fort Washington ought to be held, I shall not take upon me to say. It is a military question which none but military men are competent to decide. Some readers, however, may think it fair to afford him an

opportunity of telling his reasons in his own words. They are given in the following letter to Washington.

"Fort Lee, November 9, 1776.

"Dear Sir: — Your Excellency's letter of the 8th this moment came to hand. I shall forward the letter to General Stevens by express. The stores at Dobbs's Ferry, I had just given orders to the Quartermaster to prepare wagons to remove them. I think the enemy will meet with some difficulty in crossing the river at Dobbs's Ferry; however, 't is not safe to trust too much to the expected difficulties they may meet there.

"By the letter that will accompany this, and was to have gone last night by Major Mifflin, your Excellency will see what measures I took before your favor came to hand. The passing of the ships up the river is, to be sure, a full proof of the insufficiency of the obstructions in the river to stop the ships from going up; but that garrison employs double the number of men to invest it that we have to occupy it. They must keep troops at King's Bridge, to prevent a communication with the country; and they dare not leave a very small number, for fear our people should attack them. Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking the garrison is of advantage, and I cannot conceive the garrison to be in any great danger. The men can be brought off at any time; but the stores may not be so easily removed, yet I think they can be got off in spite of them, if matters grow desperate.

"This post is of no importance only in conjunction

with Mount Washington. I was over there last evening: the enemy seems to be disposing matters to besiege the place; but Colonel Magaw thinks it will take them till December expires before they can carry it. If the enemy don't find it an object of importance they won't trouble themselves about possessing it. Our giving it up will open a free communication with the country by the way of King's Bridge, that must be a great advantage to them and injury to us. If the enemy cross the river, I shall follow your Excellency's advice respecting the cattle and forage. These measures, however cruel in appearance, were ever my maxims of war in the defence of a country: in an attack they would be very improper.

"By this express several packets from Congress are forwarded to you. I shall collect our whole strength and watch the motions of the enemy, and pursue such measures for the future as circumstances render necessary.

"As I have your Excellency's permission, I shall order General Stevens on as far as Equacannock at least. That is an important pass; I am fortifying it as fast as possible.

"I am, dear Sir, your most obedient and very humble servant,

"N. Greene."

It will hardly be denied that there is weight in these considerations; and it is impossible, as we follow the army in its painful retreat through the Jerseys, not to wish that Fort Washington could

have been preserved, and the necessity of that retreat avoided. Neither will it be denied that the defence of a half-finished redoubt and a rail-fence covered with hay, at Bunker Hill, against the best troops of the British army, afforded some grounds for hoping that a post which nature had made so strong might he held against an enemy no stronger. That American yeoman had not lost their skill or their courage in acquiring the discipline of regular soldiers, was proved in the same month of the next year at Fort Mercer and Fort Mifflin. Greene may have been mistaken; the questionable logic of results is against him; but his matured judgment still continued to approve what his immature judgment had suggested, and the conqueror of the South, after the experience of five campaigns, still believed that the possession of Fort Washington was worth a struggle. Mr. Bancroft calls this adherence to his opinion a refusal to "*acknowledge his glaring errors of judgment.*" Strange that Washington should have continued to rely upon such a man! He finds *disingenuousness* in Greene's attributing the loss of the Fort to a panic; Magaw said the same thing. Still, the only question which a civilian can be held competent to decide is, first, how far, as a question of discipline, Greene was justified in reinforcing the garrison before the eighth of November, and, secondly, in continuing to hold the Fort after Washington's letter of that day. The first question has been answered by Mr. Sparks, who not only wrote with the documents before him, but who brought to the study of them a candor of spirit, a rectitude of intention, and a soundness of

judgment which have secured him a place second only to that of Peter Force, if second to any, among the students of our Revolutionary annals.

"General Greene," says this excellent man, whose name I cannot write without a thrill of tenderness and gratitude, both for the services which he rendered the history of my country and the parental kindness with which he aided me in my study of it, — "General Greene, who was now stationed at Fort Lee (formerly called Fort Constitution), gave notice, on the 31st of October, that the enemy had taken possession of Fort Independence, on the north side of Kingsbridge, having made their appearance in that quarter two days before; that he had previously caused everything valuable to be removed, and the bridges to be cast down. "I should be glad to know your Excellency's mind," he adds, about holding all the ground from Kingsbridge to the lines. If we attempt to hold the ground, the garrison must be reinforced, but if the garrison is to be drawn into Fort Washington, and we only keep that, the number of troops on the island is too large." In reply, the Commander-in-Chief wrote, that the question could be answered only by being on the spot, and knowing all the circumstances, and that he should submit the whole to the judgment of General Greene, reminding him of the original design to garrison the works, and preserve the lower lines as long as they could be kept, and thus, by holding a communication across the river, to stop the enemy's ships from passing up and down." * Up to the end of Octo-

* Sparks's Writings of Washington, IV. 158, note.

ber, then, Greene had done nothing to diminish the confidence which Washington placed in his judgment and sincerity. From the beginning of November to the eighth of it he had full authority to follow his own judgment. Up to the same day Washington himself believed that Fort Washington might be held.

On the eighth of November Washington wrote: "The late passage of three vessels up the North River, of which we have just received advice, is so plain a proof of the inefficiency of all the obstructions we have thrown into it, that I cannot but think it will fully justify *a change* in the disposition which has been made. If we cannot prevent vessels from passing up, and the enemy are possessed of the surrounding country, what valuable purpose can it answer to attempt to hold a post from which the expected benefit cannot be had? I am therefore *inclined to think* that it will not be prudent to hazard the men and stores at Mount Washington; *but as you are on the spot, I leave it to you to give such orders as to evacuating Mount Washington, as you may judge best, and so far revoking the order given to Colonel Magaw to defend it to the last.*"

If we weigh these expressions, and give them their true force, we shall see, first of all, that Washington, on the eighth, was *inclined to think*, — not that he positively thought: in other words, he was wavering in the opinion which he had previously held, and again authorized Greene to decide for him, because Greene was on the spot and he was not. Greene, for the reasons assigned in his letter of the ninth,

which I have already laid before the reader, decided to strengthen the garrison and try to hold the fort. This Washington knew, at least, as early as the eleventh. On the thirteenth he reached Fort Lee, where he remained part, if not the whole of the next day, as his letter of that date to the President of Congress from "General Greene's Quarters" shows. For a part of two days, then, and three days before the attack, *he also was on the spot*, and the reason for intrusting the decision to Greene ceased. It was in his power at any time from the thirteenth to the morning of the sixteenth to have visited the garrison and examined for himself the question of evacuation. But was it in his power to remove the troops? If we take literally a passage in his letter of the 19th November to his brother, it was not. "I did not care," he says, "to give an absolute order for withdrawing the garrison till I could get round and see the situation of things, and then it became too late, as the fort was invested." But on the fourteenth, when he had already been part of a day if not a whole one at "General Greene's Quarters," he writes the President of Congress, "I propose to stay in this neighborhood a few days, in which time I expect the designs of the enemy will be more disclosed, and their incursions be made in this quarter, *or their investiture of Fort Washington*, if they are intended." The earliest mention that I find of the investment is on the fifteenth. Might not the same energy and power of combination which, in twenty-four hours, prepared the means for removing "nine thousand men, . . . . with their provisions, military

stores, field artillery and ordnance, except a few worthless iron cannon," (I use Mr. Bancroft's words, p. 105,) "and transported them from within ear-shot of the enemy across the East River where it is broadest and swiftest, have removed two thousand six hundred men across the North River, where the breadth is less and the current not so strong, and from a position which made it difficult for the enemy to discover their movements? That this was possible, Greene always believed; that it was not impossible, Washington must have believed when he wrote Magaw that if he would hold out till night he would try to get him off. In the opinion of Stedman, the best English military historian of the war, the "grand error was in not withdrawing the garrison the evening preceding the assault." (Stedman's History of the American War, Vol. I. p. 218, 4th ed.) However this may be, the documents, fairly and candidly considered, admit of but one conclusion: that Greene's responsibility ceased with Washington's arrival at Fort Lee on the thirteenth. When Greene's ceased, whose began?

One more illustration of the style of Mr. Bancroft's censures upon Greene's part in the fall of Fort Washington: "Greene, whose command now extended to that fort, had not *scrupled* to increase its garrison," 184. Very true; but if Mr. Bancroft had added the following sentence from Greene's letter of October 24th, the effect upon the reader's mind would have been somewhat modified. "General Putnam requested a party of men to reinforce them at Mount Washington. I sent between two and three hundred

of Colonel Durkee's regiment. Please to inform me whether your Excellency approves thereof." If we bear in mind that at this time Washington himself was in favor of holding Fort Washington, it will be difficult to discover anything in Greene's conduct but an eager desire to do his duty. When, indeed, did any other desire ever find entrance into that pure and earnest mind? And in the performance of that duty I have not found a single instance in which, acting before orders, he did not immediately communicate his action to Washington for approval.

"And again on the last day of October, Greene, who was as blindly confident as Putnam, wrote to Washington for instructions; but without waiting for them, he again reinforced Magaw with the rifle regiment of Rawlings," p. 184. Would it not be fairly inferred from this statement that Greene had said nothing to Washington about this reinforcement? Yet in the very letter in which he asks for instructions he writes, "I shall reinforce Colonel Magaw with Colonel Rawlings's regiment, until I hear from your Excellency respecting the matter." This "matter" was the "holding the ground from King's Bridge to the lower lines," which, as we have already seen (letter of October 31), implied a strengthening of the garrison. Greene probably thought himself entitled to the praise of forethought rather than to the blame of assumption. Remember, too, that Washington in his answer, as we have also seen, refers to the original motive for holding the lines in a manner to show that he was still in favor of holding them.

## VI. Greene did not scruple, &c.

Of the manner in which Mr. Bancroft has invited censure of Greene even stronger than that which he has expressed; of the skilful selection of such terms as "*did not scruple*," where history would have said *did not hesitate*, if the severe and cautious muse of truth had deemed any qualification necessary in the statement of a simple fact; of the fidelity with which he transforms Greene's "*any great danger*" into *any conceivable danger;* of the fairness of construction by which, in one of the most insidious sentences ever framed, coupling Greene's name with Lee's, he represents an honest act of judgment on a question referred to his decision as a resolute intention to disobey, for selfish ends, the orders of his superiors; of the insinuation that in holding — though with Washington's knowledge — a direct correspondence with Congress, he was trying to build up for himself a reputation independent of the Commander-in-Chief; of the historic justice with which an officer, whose zeal, activity, and incessant watchfulness are placed beyond question by documentary evidence, and the unvarying testimony of all who knew him, is made personally responsible for the failure of imperfectly trained soldiers to distinguish flat-boats cautiously stealing at midnight up the Hudson, where the palisades on one side and Mount Washington on the other cast their deepest shadows on the waters of the broad river; of the boldness with which the charge of *disingenuousness* is brought against the man whom Washington loved in life and wept for in death as

"great and good," I have nothing to say. The question between Mr. Bancroft and me is not a personal, but a historical question, and I would wish to treat it with the sobriety and the exactness of history. But I may venture to remind him, that, while no historian can hope to escape all error, no one also can be said to have given satisfactory evidence of his love of truth who withholds from his readers the means of testing the justice of his judgments and the accuracy of his assertions.

### VII. Greene's easy, sanguine Disposition.

In the 12th chapter, which is devoted to the retreat through the Jerseys, Mr. Bancroft continues his accusations. "His (Howe's) first object was Fort Lee, . . . . which was in the more danger, as Greene, indulging his easy, sanguine disposition, had neglected Washington's timely order to prepare for its evacuation by the removal of its stores," 194.

As usual, Mr. Bancroft gives no authority for attributing an "easy, sanguine disposition" to Greene. Henry Lee, who served under him and knew him well, ascribes to him a habit of mind which it is somewhat difficult to reconcile with such a disposition. "No man," says he, "was more familiarized to dispassionate and minute research than was General Greene. He was patient in hearing everything offered, never interrupting or slighting what was said; and having possessed himself of the subject fully, he would enter into a critical comparison of the opposite arguments, convincing his hearers, as he progressed, with the propriety of the decision he was

about to pronounce." * But the accusation is of so grave a nature, that I purpose to give the reader an opportunity of forming his own opinion, by showing how this "easy, sanguine" man was employed during his command at Fort Lee.

"FORT CONSTITUTION, October 12th, five o'clock, 1776.

"DEAR GENERAL: — I am informed a large body of the enemy's troops have landed at Frogg's Point. If so, I suppose the troops here will be wanted there. I have three brigades in readiness to reinforce you. General Clinton's brigade will march first, General Nixon's next, and then the troops under the command of General Boberdeau. I don't apprehend any danger from this quarter at present. If the forces on your side are not sufficient, I hope these three brigades may be ordered over, and I with them, and leave General Ewing's brigade to guard the post. If the troops are wanted on your side, or likely to be, in the morning, they should be got over in the latter part of the night, as the shipping may move up from below, and impede if not totally stop the troops from passing. I wait your Excellency's further commands. Should be glad to know where the enemy has landed, and their number.

"I am, &c.,

"N. GREENE.

"P. S. — The tents upon Staten Island have been all struck, as far as discovery has been made."

* Lee's Memoirs, Vol. II. p. 39.

This may correspond to Mr. Bancroft's idea of an *easy, sanguine disposition;* although I think that most historians would find in it promptness, energy, and devotion to the cause. But let us take a few more specimens.

"CAMP AT FORT LEE (LATELY FORT CONSTITUTION),
"October 20, 1776.

"TO THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS:—

"SIR:—I was at head-quarters near King's Bridge, with his Excellency General Washington, last night, and on leaving him was desired to send by express to acquaint you that the army are in great want of a large supply of cartridges, which no person can be spared to make. Therefore he requests that you will order all that are now made up at Philadelphia to be sent forward in light wagons that can travel with great despatch, as they are really much wanted; and as none can be made up here, that persons be employed at Philadelphia to continue at that business, to furnish a full supply for the army.

"Mr. Commissary Lowry is in great want of a supply of salt, which he begs may be sent to Trenton, to enable him to furnish provisions for the army at King's Bridge, which are much wanted, and the supply from Connecticut may be shortly cut off, and I have great reason to apprehend the evil will soon take place, if not wholly, in part. The article of salt is essentially necessary, and must be procured, if possible. Fresh provisions cannot be passed over without great difficulty; and the state of health of the troops from a laxed habit requires a supply of salt.

Mr. Lowry mentions the Council of Safety of Pennsylvania having a quantity.

"I am, with great respect, your obedient servant,

"NATHANAEL GREENE."

"FORT LEE, October 24, 1776.

"To GENERAL WASHINGTON: —

"DEAR SIR: — Enclosed you have a copy of the letter in answer to mine to Congress, relative to cartridges. As soon as the cartridges come up they shall be forwarded. Colonel Biddle has written to Amboy for ninety thousand that are at that post.

"We have collected all the wagons in our power, and sent over. Our people have had extreme hard duty: the common guards, common fatigue, and the extraordinary guards, extraordinary fatigue; for the removal of the stores, and forwarding the provisions has kept every man on duty.

"General Putnam requested a party of men to reinforce them at Mount Washington. I sent between two and three hundred of Colonel Durkee's regiment. Please to inform me whether your Excellency approves thereof.

"We shall get a sufficient quantity of provisions over to-day for the garrison at Fort Washington. General Mifflin thinks it not advisable to pull the barracks down yet. He has hopes of our army returning to that ground for winter quarters. I think this would be running too great a risk to leave them standing in expectation of such an event, there being several strong fortifications in and about King's Bridge. If the enemy should throw in a thousand

or fifteen hundred men they could cut off our communications effectually, and, as the state of the barracks are, they would find exceedingly good cover for the men. But if we were to take the barracks down, if the boards were not removed, it would in a great measure deprive them of that advantage. However, I have not had it in my power to do either as yet.

"I have directed all the wagons that were on the other side to be employed in picking up the scattered boards about the encampment. I believe, from what I saw yesterday in riding over the ground, they will amount to many thousands. As soon as we have got these together I purpose to begin upon the barracks. In the mean time should be glad to know if your Excellency has any further orders to give respecting the business.

"I have directed the commissary and quartermaster-general of this department to lay in provision and provender upon the back road to Philadelphia for twenty thousand men for three months. The principal magazine will be at Equacanack. I shall fortify it as soon as possible, and secure that post and the pass to the bridge, which is now repaired, and fit for an army to pass over with the baggage and artillery.

"I rejoice to hear of the defeat of that vile traitor Major Rogers, and his party of tories; though I am exceeding sorry to hear it cost us so brave an officer as Major Greene.

"I am, with great respect, your Excellency's obedient servant,

"NATHANAEL GREENE."

"Fort Lee, October 27, 1776.

"To General Mifflin: —

"Dear Sir: — By Major Howell you will receive one hundred and nineteen thousand musket cartridges. Part arrived to-day, and part last night. As soon as the remainder comes up from Amboy and Philadelphia, they shall be sent forward. I have been to view the roads again, and fixed upon Aquacanack, Springfield, Boundbrook, Princetown, and Trentown to establish the magazines at. Trentown and Aquacanack to be the principal ones, the others only to serve to support the troops in passing from one to the other. They are all inland posts, and I hope the stores will be secure. I have ordered all the cannon from Amboy except two eighteen-pounders and two field-pieces. I have directed them to be sent to Springfield, Boundbrook, and Aquacanack, to secure the stores.

"The people have been employed on the other side in getting the boards together at Fort Washington and the ferry. Some have been brought from King's Bridge. To-day I sent up to Colonel Lasher to know what assistance he could give towards taking down the barracks, and bringing off the boards, and had for answer that he had orders to burn the barracks, quit the post, and join the army by the way of the North River, at the White Plains.

"We have had a considerable skirmish on York Island to-day. The cannonade began in the morning, and held until evening, with very short intermissions. A ship moved up opposite Fort No. 1. Colonel Magaw got down an eighteen-pounder and

fired sixty shot at her, twenty-six of which went into her. She slipped her cable, and left her anchor, and was towed off by four boats. I think we must have killed a considerable number of her men, as the confusion and distress exceeded all description. Our artillery behaved incomparably well. Colonel Magaw is charmed at their conduct in firing at the ship, and in the fields. I left the island at three o'clock this afternoon. We had lost but one man: he was killed by a shell that fell upon his head. We have brought off some of the enemy from the field of battle, and more are still lying on the ground dead.

"I am anxious to know the state of the troops in the grand army: whether they are high or low-spirited; whether well or ill posted; whether a battle is expected or not. We must govern our operations by yours. The troops here and on the other side are in good spirits, but I fear quitting Fort Independence will oblige Magaw to draw in his forces into the garrison, as the enemy will have a passage open upon his back. I fear it will damp the spirits of his troops. He did not expect it so soon. If the barracks are not burnt in the morning, and the enemy don't press too hard upon us, we will try to get away some of the boards.

"I am, dear General, your obedient servant,

"NATH. GREENE."

This last paragraph contains, as will be seen, the "fear for the spirits of the troops," which, by an ingenious and most suggestive juxtaposition, Mr. Ban-

croft leads the reader to look upon as a part of the "murmuring" letter of the 29th to Washington.

"FORT LEE, New Jersey, October 28th, 1776.

"TO THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS: —

"SIR: — This being a critical hour, when the hopes and fears of the city and country are continually alarmed, and yesterday there being a considerable heavy cannonade most of the day, I have thought it advisable to forward an express with an account of the action of the day. The communication between this and the grand division of the army is in great measure cut off; therefore it will be some time before you have any account from his Excellency General Washington.

"A ship moved up the river early in the morning above our lower lines, right opposite to Fort No. 1, near old head-quarters at Morriss's; she began a brisk cannonade upon the shore. Colonel Magaw, who commands at Fort Washington, got down an eighteen-pounder and fired sixty rounds at her: twenty-six went through her: the gun was mostly loaded with two balls. She was annoyed considerably by two eighteen-pounders from this shore. The confusion and distress that appeared on board the ship exceeds all description. Without doubt she lost a great number of men. She was towed off by four boats sent from the other ships to her assistance; she slipped her cable and left her anchor. Had the tide run flood one half-hour longer we should have sunk her. At the same time the fire from the ships began, the enemy brought up their field-pieces and

made a disposition to attack the line; but Colonel Magaw had so happily disposed and arranged his men as to put them out of conceit of that manœuvre.

"A cannonade and fire with small arms continued almost all day, with very little intermission. We lost one man only. Several of the enemy were killed; two or three of our people got and brought off the field and several more were left there. The firing ceased last evening, and has not been renewed this morning.

"General Washington and General Howe are very near neighbors. Some decisive stroke is hourly expected. God grant it may be a happy one! The troops are in good spirits, and in every engagement since the retreat from New York have given the enemy a drubbing.

"I have the honor to be your most obedient humble servant,

"NATHANAEL GREENE."

If these letters fail to display Greene's vigilance and activity, the two last certainly display his modesty; for in his account of this skirmish, which he evidently considered a creditable one, he gives all the credit to Magaw. Even Mr. Bancroft has admitted "that Greene animated the defence by his presence." But let us see what else he was doing at this time.

"FORT LEE, October 29, 1776.

"TO GENERAL WASHINGTON: —

"DEAR SIR: — Enclosed is an estimate made of the provisions and provender necessary to be laid in at

the different posts between this and Philadelphia, to form a communication, and for the support of the troops passing and repassing from the different states.

"Your Excellency will please to examine it, and signify your pleasure. Should the estimate be larger than is necessary for the consumption of the army, very little or no loss can arise, as the articles will be laid in at a season when the prices of things are at the lowest rates, and the situation will admit of an easy transportation to market by water.

"The ships have fallen down the North River, and the troops which advanced upon Harlem Plains and on the hill where the Monday's action was, have drawn within their lines again.

"I received the prisoners taken and have forwarded them to Philadelphia. I enclose you a return of the troops at this post, who are chiefly raw and undisciplined.

"I am with great respect your Excellency's most obedient humble servant,

"NATHANAEL GREENE."

Another letter to Washington, of the same date, has already been given above. On the 31st Greene again writes: —

"FORT LEE, October 31, 1776.

"DEAR SIR: — The enemy have possession of Fort Independence on the heights above King's Bridge. They made their appearance the night before last. We had got everything of value away. The bridges are cut down, and I gave Colonel Magaw orders to stop the road between the mountains.

"I should be glad to know your Excellency's mind about holding all the ground from King's Bridge to the lower lines. If we attempt to hold the ground the garrison must still be reinforced; but if the garrison is to draw into Mount Washington, and only keep that, the number of troops on the island is too large.

"We are not able to determine with any certainty whether the troops that have taken post above King's Bridge are the same troops or not that were in and about Harlem several days past. They disappeared from below all at once, and some time after about fifty boats full of men were seen going up towards Hunt's Point, and that evening the enemy were discovered at Fort Independence. We suspect them to be the same troops that were engaged in the Sunday skirmish.

"Six officers belonging to privateers that were taken by the enemy made their escape last night. They inform me that they were taken by the last fleet that came in. They had about six thousand foreign troops on board, one quarter of which had the black scurvy and died very fast.

"Seventy sail of transports and ships fell down to Red Hook. They were bound for Rhode Island; had on board about three thousand troops. They also inform that after the Sunday action an officer of distinction was brought into the city badly wounded.

"The ships have come up the river to their station again, a little below their lines. Several deserters from Powle's Hook have come over. They all report that General Howe is wounded, as did those

from the fleet. It appears to be a prevailing opinion in the land and sea service.

"I forwarded your Excellency a return of the troops at this post, and a copy of a plan for establishing magazines. I could wish to know your pleasure as to the magazines as soon as possible.

"I shall reinforce Colonel Magaw with Colonel Rawlings's regiment until I hear from your Excellency respecting the matter.

"The motions of the grand army will best determine the propriety of endeavoring to hold all the ground from King's Bridge to the lower lines. I shall be as much on the Island of York as possible, so as not to neglect the duties of my own department.

"I can learn no satisfactory accounts of the action of the other day.

"I am, &c.,

"NATHANAEL GREENE."

Again, on the 5th of November, from

"KING'S FERRY, November 5th, 1776.

"DEAR SIR: — Colonel Harrison wrote me you were in great want of flour. 'T is attended with very great difficulty to bring it up from Fort Lee by land. Wagons can't be got to transport a sufficient supply for your army. At Dobbs's Ferry there are eight or nine hundred barrels brought from the other side. I have directed Colonel Tupper to load a number of the pettiaugers and flat-bottom boats and send them up to Peekskill. Our troops are so arranged along shore that I am in hopes to keep a passage open

for this mode of conveyance. If it can be done it will save an amazing expense.

"I found everything in this place in the utmost confusion, — the wagons and flour detained for want of boats and assistance to transport them over. I shall send Captain Pond hither as soon as I get back, to take charge of the public stores here and to transport the things across. Colonel Tupper is to convey the pettiaugers by the ships, and if the barges are manned the boats are to be run on shore, and Major Clark, who commands a party opposite the ships, is to protect them.

"I shall attempt to transport public stores from Burdett's Ferry, if the enemy make no new disposition. The utmost care shall be taken that nothing falls into the enemy's hands.

"I am informed by Colonel Harrison that your Excellency approves of the plan for forming the magazines. I have directed the Commissaries of the department to lay in the provisions as far as possible, and the Quartermaster-General is exerting himself to lay in provender.

"Many of our people have got into huts. The tents are sent forward as fast as the people get their huts complete.

"Should this ferry be wanted through the winter the landing must be altered. I can, by altering the road, shorten the distance two miles, one by land, the other by water. Where it now is it freezes up very soon; where I propose it, it is open all winter.

"I am now in the State of New York, and am informed by Colonel Hawkes Hay that the militia

which he commands refuse to do duty. They say that General Howe has promised them peace, liberty, and safety; and that is all they want. What is to be done with them? This spirit and temper should be checked in its infancy. I purpose to send the Colonel about fifty men, and have directed the Colonel to acquaint them, if they refuse to do duty agreeable to the orders of the State, that I will send up a regiment here and march them to Fort Lee, to do duty there. I beg your Excellency's further advice.

"I am informed the Virginia regiments are coming on. I wish I could form a party sufficiently strong to make a little diversion in the rear of the enemy by the way of King's Bridge. The Hessians have relaid the bridge, and been across; but yesterday morning I believe they all went back again. What does your Excellency think of such a manœuvre? Is it practicable? Has it the appearance of being successful if attempted and well conducted?

"We have a flying report that General Gates has defeated Burgoyne. We also hear that a party of Hessians had deserted over to us. I wish to know the truth of both reports.

All things were quiet at Fort Lee and York Island yesterday at noon.

"The people seem to be much alarmed at Philadelphia at the success of the enemy. The country is greatly alarmed at having their grain and hay burnt; yet I believe it will answer a most valuable purpose. I wish it had been earlier agreed upon.

"I am informed Hugh Gaine, the printer, is gone

into New York. I have ordered all the boats stove from Burdett's Ferry to Hobrock, and from Powley's Hook to Bergen Point, to stop the communication. There is a vile generation here as well as with you. The committee from Philadelphia for inquiring into the state of the army, complains that enlisting orders are not given out. Please to let me know your pleasure.

"I am, &c.,

"N. GREENE."

Two days after he writes again from Fort Lee: —

"FORT LEE, November 7th, 1776.

"DEAR SIR: — By an express from Major Clark, stationed at Dobbs's Ferry, I find the enemy are encamped right opposite, to the number of between three and five thousand, and the Major adds, from their disposition and search after boats they design to cross the river. A frigate and two transports or provision boats passed the *chevaux de frise* night before last; they were prodigiously shattered from the fire of our cannon. The same evening Colonel Tupper attempted passing the ships with the pettiaugers loaded with flour. The enemy manned several barges, two tenders, and a row galley, and attacked them. Our people run the pettiaugers ashore and landed and defended them. The enemy attempted to land several times, but were repulsed. The fire lasted about an hour and a half, and the enemy moved off. Colonel Tupper still thinks he can transport the provisions in flat-boats. A second attempt

shall be speedily made. We lost one man mortally wounded.

"General Mercer writes me the Virginia troops are coming on. They are now at Trent Town. He proposes an attack on Staten Island; but the motions of the enemy are such I think it necessary for them to come forward as fast as possible. On York Island the enemy have taken possession of the far hill next to Spiten Devil. I think they will not be able to penetrate any further. There appears to be about fifteen hundred of them. From the enemy's motions, I should be apt to suspect they were retreating from your army, or, at least, altering their operations.

"Mr. Lovell, who at last is enlarged from his confinement, reports that Colonel Allen, his fellow-prisoner, was informed that transports were getting in readiness to sail at a moment's warning sufficient to transport fifteen thousand men.

"The officers of Colonel Hand's regiment are here with enlisting orders. The officers of the Pennsylvania regiments think it a grievance, (such of them as are commissioned for the new establishment,) that the officers of other regiments should have the privilege of enlisting their men before they get orders. I have stopped it until I learn your Excellency's pleasure. General Ewing is very much opposed to it. You'll please to favor me with a line on the subject.

"I am, &c., &c.,

"NATHL. GREENE."

I add one more specimen of this "easy, sanguine disposition."

"Fort Lee, November 10, 1776.

"Dear Sir: — Your Excellency's favor by Colonel Harrison of the 8th came to hand last evening. I am taking every measure in my power to oppose the enemy's landing, if they attempt crossing the river into the Jerseys. I have about five hundred men posted at the different passes in the mountains fortifying. About five hundred more are marching from Amboy directly for Dobbs's Ferry. General Mercer is with me now. I shall send him up to take the command of these immediately. I have directed the General to have everything removed out of the enemy's way, particularly cattle, carriages, hay and grain. The flour at Dobbs's Ferry is all moved from that place, and I have directed wagons to transport it to Clark's and Orange towns. I was at Dobbs's Ferry last night, left it at sundown; saw no new movements of the enemy. The enemy landed from on board the ships many bales of goods supposed to be clothing. I am sure the enemy cannot land at Dobbs's Ferry, it will be so hedged up by night. The flats run off a great distance; they can't get near the shore with their ships. If the enemy attempts to effect a landing at all, they'll attempt it at Naiacks or Haverstraw Bay. I wish their intelligences may not be calculated to deceive us. Methinks if the enemy intended crossing the river they would not give us several days to prepare to oppose them. They might have prepared their measures, lain concealed until they had got everything in readiness to cross the river, and then effected it at once. It might have been so much easier accomplished that way

than it can now, and so many more advantages obtained in getting possession of the grain, hay, cattle, wagons, and horses, that I cannot help suspecting it to be only a feint to lead our attention astray. I wish it may not turn out so. However, I shall exert myself as much to be in readiness as if they had actually landed, and make the same disposition to oppose them as if I was certain they intended to cross.

"I shall keep a good intelligent officer at Bergen and another at Ball's Ferry to watch the motions of the ships.

"Your Excellency's letter to General Putnam this moment came to hand. *I have ordered the Quartermaster-General to send off all the superfluous stores*, and the commissaries to hold themselves in readiness to provide for the troops at Dobbs's Ferry and Haverstraw Bay.

"I have written to Colonel Hawkes Hay to have the road altered at King's Ferry. I directed Colonel Tupper to send up to that Ferry all the spare boats. I had given orders for collecting and scuttling all the boats before your Excellency's letter came to hand on the subject. Our numbers are small for the duties we have to go through, but I hope our exertions may be in some proportion to your Excellency's expectation. Sixty or seventy sail of shipping from Frogg's Point and Morrisania have fallen down the East River to New York. In my next I will enclose your Excellency a return of the stores of all kinds at this post, and take your further directions as to the disposition of them.

"Believe me, dear General, to be, &c.,

"NATHANAEL GREENE."

I have been thus profuse of illustration, because I was anxious to let Greene paint himself. How far the *easy* could be attributed to the author of such letters and the doer of such things I leave the reader to decide. Against the *sanguine* I have nothing to say.

## VIII. Neglect of Orders.

The accusation of neglect to obey "Washington's timely order to prepare for its (Fort Lee's) evacuation by the removal of *its stores*," would be more serious if it were not disproved by documents which are published by Force, in volumes cited by Mr. Bancroft. It would be an insult to the industry upon which he justly prides himself, to suppose he had not seen them. The order is given in Washington's letter of the 8th of November. "You will, therefore, immediately have all the stores removed which you do not deem necessary for your *defence*." Mr. Bancroft's statement would have been more accurate if he had said *superfluous stores* instead of "*its stores*"; although this would not have been so easy to reconcile with the idea of *evacuation*, of which Washington says nothing, as with the idea of *defence*, to which he expressly refers. Greene's answer is given in his letter of the 10th, in which, after stating that "the flour at Dobbs's Ferry is all removed from that place, and I have directed wagons to transport it to Clarke's and Orange towns," he says, in another part and another connection, "*I have ordered the Quartermaster-General to send off all the superfluous*

*stores*, and the commissaries to hold themselves in readiness to provide for the troops at Dobbs's Ferry and Haverstraw Bay." That these "*superfluous stores*" were the stores at Fort Lee would be evident from the closing paragraph of this letter, if it were not already evident from the connection in which it stands. "*In my next*," that paragraph reads, "*I will enclose your Excellency a return of the stores of all kinds at this post, and take your further directions as to the disposition of them.*" Why a return of "*the stores of all kinds*" in answer to an express order to "*remove the stores not necessary for defence*," unless the "*stores not necessary*" had been removed or were about to be removed? Why "*further orders*," unless the orders already received had already been or were being obeyed? In historical evidence as in legal evidence the accused is entitled to the benefit of every doubt that arises from established character. Greene's letters, as we have seen, constantly refer every question to Washington for decision, and every act for approval. Can this uniform habit be reconciled with disobedience; or was Washington a man to accept professions for deeds, and give his confidence to an officer who virtually called his authority in question? When authorized to decide for himself, Greene does not *scruple* to accept the responsibility: witness the holding of Fort Washington from the 8th of November to the 13th; when circumstances call for immediate action, he acts and refers instantly to Washington for approval: witness the reinforcement of Fort Washington mentioned in the letter of the 24th October, and the prohibition for officers of one

regiment to enlist men from another regiment, as stated in his letter of the 7th November; and indeed every one of his letters, without exception, where the occasion calls for it. Therefore, until some positive proof is brought forward, he must be supposed to have obeyed the authority whose guidance and approbation he so uniformly invoked. Mr. Bancroft does not seem to be aware that, in degrading Greene, he belittles Washington.

It must also be borne in mind that Greene's command extended up the river to Haverstraw Bay, and that it was his duty to provide for the security of the men and stores all along this line. The insufficiency of the means of transportation, not at this period only, but until Greene himself became Quartermaster-General, is a fact well known to the students of our Revolutionary history. How far, in spite of this insufficiency and in the face of great obstacles, he succeeded in transporting the stores intrusted to his charge to a place of safety, the contemporary documents show. "I am sending off the stores as fast as I can get wagons," he writes Washington immediately after the fall of Fort Washington. "I have sent three expresses to Newark for boats, but can get no return of what boats we may expect from that place. The stores here are large and the transportation by land will be almost endless. The powder and fixed ammunition I have sent off first by land, as it is an article too valuable to trust upon the water." "Our ammunition, light artillery, and the best part of our stores had been removed, upon the apprehension that Howe would endeavor to

penetrate the Jerseys, in which case Fort Lee could be of no great use to us," writes Paine, who was serving on the spot as volunteer aid to General Greene.* "This loss," says Washington, speaking of the stores which actually fell into the hands of the enemy, "*was inevitable. As many of the stores had been removed as circumstances and time would admit of.*" †

## IX. Greene's Want of Vigilance; takes to Flight, etc.

Mr. Bancroft continues: "In the night of the nineteenth, two battalions of Hessian grenadiers, two companies of yagers, and the eight battalions of the English reserve, at least five thousand men, marched up the east side of the Hudson, and the next morning about daybreak crossed with their artillery to Closter landing, five miles above Fort Lee. The movement escaped Greene's attention; so that the nimble seamen were unmolested as they dragged the cannon for near half a mile up the narrow, steep, rocky road, to the top of the palisades. Aroused from his bed by the report of a countryman, Greene sent an express to the Commander-in-Chief, and having ordered his troops under arms, took to flight with more than two thousand men, leaving blankets and baggage, except what his few wagons could bear away, more than three months' provision for three thousand men, camp-kettles on the fire, above four hundred tents standing, and all the cannon except two twelve-pounders. With his utmost

* Crisis, No. 1. Force, III. 1291, 5th Series.

† Sparks's Writings of Washington, IV. 188.

speed he barely escaped being cut off; but Washington, first ordering Grayson, his aid de camp, to renew the summons for Lee to cross the river, gained the bridge over the Hackensack by a rapid march, and covered the retreat of the garrison, so that less than ninety stragglers were taken prisoners." 195, 196.

In this single paragraph Greene is again accused of negligence, his retreat called a flight, his successful exertions to preserve his men ignored, the loss of stores and cannon misrepresented by an artful enumeration, and the presence of mind and energy which excited the admiration of the best contemporary historian of the war converted into cowardice and imbecility. Mr. Bancroft might be asked whether he expected Greene to mount guard on the palisades, or having taken the usual means of protection, place the usual confidence in them?* He might also be requested to say why he neglects to mention the "*very rainy night*," mentioned by Greene in his letter to Governor Cooke, and which must necessarily have increased the difficulty of detecting the enemy's movements? Or why, when Paine, who as Greene's aid may have received the report, and must have known who brought it, asserts that it was brought by an *officer*, he should prefer the statement of the English commander, who had no especial means of knowing beyond conjecture or common hearsay? If it was brought by a countryman, as Howe says,

* In the report of detachments and outguards for November 14 I find: "Outguards, Bergen, Hoebuck, Bull's Ferry, Hackinsack, and *opposite Spiten Devil*: Captains, 1; First Lieutenants, 2; Second Lieutenants, 2; Ensigns, 2; Sergeants, 6; Drums and Fifes, 10; Privates, 145."

Greene owed his safety to accident; if by an officer, to his own vigilance; and which of the two lights the historian of the United States wishes to place him in he has left us no reason to doubt.

Coming now to the substance and details of the narrative, we shall see that it is directly contradicted in every part by Washington's letter of the 21st of November to Lee, and Greene's letter of the 4th of December to Governor Cooke, and Paine's narrative in the first number of the "Crisis." "Yesterday morning," writes Washington, "the enemy landed a large body of troops below Dobbs's Ferry, and advanced very rapidly to the fort called by your name. I immediately went over, and, as the fort was not tenable on this side, and we were in a narrow neck of land, the passes from which the enemy were attempting to seize, I directed the troops, consisting of Beall's, Heard's, the remainder of Ewing's brigades, and some other parts of broken regiments, to move over to the west side of Hackinsack river. A considerable quantity of stores and some artillery have fallen into the enemy's hands."

"The loss of Fort Washington," writes Greene to Governor Cooke on the 4th of December, "rendered Fort Lee useless; his Excellency ordered its evacuation accordingly; all the valuable stores accordingly were sent off. The enemy got intelligence of it, and as they were in possession of Harlem river, brought their boats through that pass without our notice. They crost the river in a very rainy night, and landed, about five miles above the fort, about 6,000, some accounts say 8,000. We had then at Fort

Lee only between two and three thousand effective men. His Excellency ordered a retreat immediately. We lost considerable baggage for want of wagons and a considerable quantity of stores; we had about ninety or a hundred prisoners taken; but these were a set of rascals that skulkt out of the way for fear of fighting. The troops at Fort Lee were mostly of the flying camp, irregular and undisciplined; had they obeyed orders, not a man would have been lost.

"I returned to the camp two hours after the troops marcht off. Colonel Cornell and myself got off several hundred; yet notwithstanding all our endeavors, still near a hundred remained hid in the woods."

Add to these the narrative of Paine, who was then acting as volunteer aid to Greene.

"As I was with the troops at *Fort Lee*, and marched with them to the edge of *Pennsylvania*, I am well acquainted with many circumstances which those who lived at a distance know but little or nothing of. Our situation there was exceedingly cramped, the place being on a narrow neck of land between the *North River* and the *Hackinsack*. Our force was inconsiderable, being not one fourth as great as Howe could bring against us. We had no army at hand to have relieved the garrison, had we shut ourselves up and stood on the defence. Our ammunition, light artillery, and the best part of our stores had been removed, upon the apprehension that *Howe* would endeavor to penetrate the *Jerseys*, in which case *Fort Lee* could be of no great use to us. . . . . Such was our situation, and condition of *Fort Lee* on the 20th

of November, when an officer arrived with information that the enemy, with two hundred boats, had landed about seven or eight miles above. Major-General *Greene*, who commanded the garrison, immediately ordered them under arms, and sent express to his Excellency General *Washington* at the town of *Hackinsack*, distant, by the way of the ferry, six miles. Our first object was to secure the bridge over the *Hackinsack*, which laid up the river, between the enemy and us, about six miles from us, and three from them. General *Washington* arrived in about three quarters of an hour, and marched at the head of the troops towards the bridge, which place I expected we should have a brush for; however they did not choose to dispute it with us, and the greatest part of our troops went over the bridge, the rest over the ferry, except some which passed at a mill, on a small creek between the bridge and the ferry, and made their way through some marshy grounds, up to the town of *Hackinsack*, and there passed the river. We brought off as much baggage as the wagons would contain; the rest was lost. The simple object was to bring off the garrison."

It certainly was not from this writer that Mr. Bancroft drew the materials for his elaborate picture of trepidation and flight. And with these unimpeachable documents before me and Mr. Bancroft's narrative by their side, he must excuse me if I go to his own vocabulary for the epithets which the comparison demands; and if the accusation of "invention" which he launched against the amiable and truth-loving Grahame should be thought too harsh, soften

it as he did on that memorable occasion into "unwarrantable misapprehension."

But, the reader will naturally ask, had Mr. Bancroft no authority for his narrative? I know of but one other contemporary authority. Let us see what Gordon says.

"The next object that engaged their attention was *Fort Lee*, situated upon a neck of land about ten miles long, running up the North River, on the one side, and on the other bounded by the Hackensack and the English neighborhood, a branch of it, neither of which are fordable near the fort. The neck joins the mainland almost opposite to the communication between the North and East Rivers at King's Bridge. On the 19th, in the morning, Lord *Cornwallis*, by means of boats which entered the North River through this communication, landed near Closter, only a mile and a half from the English neighborhood. His force consisted of the first and second battalions of light infantry, two companies of Chasseurs, two battalions of British and two ditto of Hessian grenadiers, two battalions of guards, and the thirty-third and forty-second regiments. The account of this movement was brought to General *Greene* while in bed. Without waiting for General *Washington's* orders, he directed the troops to march immediately and secure their retreat by possessing themselves of the English neighborhood; he sent off at the same time information to General *Washington* at *Hackinsack* town. Having gained the ground and drawn up the troops in face of the enemy, he left them under the command of General *Washington*, and returned to pick up the stragglers

and others, whom, to the amount of about 300, he conveyed over the Hackinsack to a place of safety. By this decided movement of General *Greene's* 3,000 Americans escaped, the capture of whom, at this period, must have proved ruinous. Lord Cornwallis's intent was evidently to form a line across from the place of landing to Hackinsack bridge, and thereby to hem in the whole garrison between the north and Hackinsack, but General *Greene* was too alert for him. His lordship had but a mile and a half to march, whereas it was four miles from Fort Lee to the road approaching the head of the English neighborhood, where the other amused his lordship till General Washington arrived, and by a well-concerted retreat secured the bridge over the Hackinsack." *

This account differs, as it will be seen, from all the others, in expressly claiming for Greene the merit of securing the road to Hackinsack bridge. It would not be difficult to reconcile Gordon's narrative with the narratives of Washington, Greene, and Paine, and General Greene has nothing to lose and Mr. Bancroft nothing to gain by this reconciliation. But for my present purpose it is not necessary. Gordon contradicts Mr. Bancroft even more pointedly than any of the other authorities contradict him; and before he can ask to be believed, he must bring witnesses superior to the Commander-in-Chief, Washington, who tells us what he did; to the commander of the fort, Greene, who tells us what he and Washington did; to the eyewitness, Paine, who tells us what he saw; and to the contemporary historian, Gordon,

* Gordon, Vol. II. p. 352.

who tells us what he gathered from the letters and the mouths of the actors.

## X. Trenton and Princeton. How Greene "reposed."

In the brilliant and daring conception of the attack upon Trenton, the only part assigned by Mr. Bancroft to Greene is, "The general officers, especially Stirling, Mercer, Sullivan, and, above all, Greene, rendered the greatest aid in preparing the expedition," p. 224. In the other still bolder, and still more brilliant movements which closed the campaign, Mr. Bancroft writes: "Washington lost no time in renewing his scheme for driving the enemy to the extremity of New Jersey. . . . . *While his companions in arms were reposing, he was indefatigable in his preparations*," p. 239. Of Greene's claim to have done something more than repose through these critical days, Hamilton, who a few weeks later became Washington's confidential aid, wrote in a discourse pronounced before the members of the Cincinnati, — actors many of them in these events: "As long as the measures which conducted us safely through the first and most critical stages of the war shall be remembered with approbation; as long as the enterprises of Trenton and Princeton shall be regarded as the dawnings of that bright day which afterwards broke forth with such resplendent lustre; as long as the almost magic operations of the remainder of that remarkable winter, distinguished not more by these events than by the extraordinary spectacle of a powerful army straitened within nar-

row limits by the phantom of a military force, and never permitted to transgress those limits with impunity, in which skill supplied the place of means and disposition was the substitute for an army; as long, I say, as these operations shall continue to be the object of wonder, so long ought the name of Greene to be revered by a grateful country. To attribute to him a portion of the praise which is due as well to the *formation as to the execution* of the plans that effected these important ends can be no derogation from that wisdom and magnanimity which knew how to select and embrace counsels worthy of being pursued." * "It would seem," says the judicious and accurate Sparks, in citing this passage, "that General Greene had his full share in *lending efficient counsel* on the present occasion, as well as during the previous part of the campaign." †

Of Greene's method of "*reposing*," the following letters may perhaps be accepted as a suggestive illustration.

"PRINCETON, December 7th, 1776.

"DEAR SIR: — Lord Stirling will write by the same express that this comes by, and enclose your Excellency several pieces of intelligence obtained of different people yesterday. His Lordship thinks the enemy are making a disposition to advance. For my part, I am at a loss to determine whether their disposition is made to advance or for defence. The enemy have got a party advanced about seven miles this side Brunswic; another at Boundbrook, with

* Hamilton's Works, Vol. II. † Sparks, Vol. IV. p. 544.

an advanced guard two miles this side of the town. 'T is reported by some of the country people that the enemy intend to advance in two columns; one this, the other Boundbrook road. General Mercer advanced upon this road, and I should think the German battalion might be advantageously posted on the other road.

"Major Clarke reports General Lee is as the heels of the enemy. I should think he had better keep upon the flanks than the rear of the enemy, unless it were possible to concert an attack at the same instant of time in front and rear.

"Our retreat should not be neglected, for fear of consequences. The bottom of the river should be examined, and see if boats can be anchored in the ferry-way. If there is no anchor-ground, the bridge must be thrown over below. Colonel Biddle had better make a trial immediately, that we may not be in confusion. If a bridge cannot be thrown over, forty boats should be manned under the care of a good officer, and held in readiness. With these boats prudently managed, the troops could be thrown over in a very short time. Methinks all the cannon that don't come forward with the army might well be posted on the other side of the river to cover a retreat.

"I think General Lee must be confined within the lines of some general plan, or else his operations will be independent of yours. His own troops, General St. Clair's, and the militia must form a respectable body.

"If General Dickinson would engage the militia

for some definite time, there might be some dependence upon them, but no operations can be safely planned wherein they are to act a part, unless they can be bound by some further tie than the common obligation of a militia-man. I think if the General was at length to engage his militia on some such plea, your Excellency might take your measures accordingly.

"This moment a captain has returned that went to reconnoitre last night, and it is beyond a doubt the enemy are advancing, and my Lord Stirling thinks they will be up here by twelve o'clock. I shall make the best disposition I can to oppose them.

"I am, &c.,

"NATHANAEL GREENE."

"CORYELL'S FERRY, DELAWARE, December 16, 1776.

"TO THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS: —

"SIR: — I take the liberty to recommend Dr. Warren to the Congress as a very suitable person to receive an appointment of a sub-director, which, I am informed, they are about to create a number of. Dr. Warren has given great satisfaction where he has the direction of business. He is a young gentleman of ability, humanity, and great application to business.

"I feel a degree of happiness that the Congress are going to put the hospital department upon a better establishment, for the sick, this campaign, have suffered beyond description, and shocking to humanity. For my own part, I have never felt any

distress equal to what the sufferings of the sick have occasioned, and am confident that nothing will injure the recruiting service so much as the dissatisfaction arising upon that head.

"I am, &c.,

"NATHANAEL GREENE."

Surely activity, energy, a comprehensive view of the duties and questions of the moment, may be claimed for the author of these letters. Who but one with whom Washington freely and confidingly took counsel could have written the letter of the 7th December from Princeton?

"CORYELL'S FERRY, December 21, 1776.

"TO THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS: —

"SIR: — Although I am far from thinking the American cause desperate, yet I conceive it to be in a critical situation: the enemy in the heart of the country; the difficulties daily increasing; the continental money losing its currency; the time for which the troops stand engaged almost ready to expire; very few enlisted upon the new establishment; the tide of public sentiment at a stand, and ready to run through different channels; the people refusing to supply the army, under various pretences, but evidently from a disaffection to the cause and to the currency, are combined evils, calculated to pave the way for General Howe's advance, who, having cantoned his troops advantageously, stands prepared to take advantage of these circumstances, which, I am sorry to say, afford him but too favor-

able a prospect. It is necessary, in addition to this disagreeable train of evils, that the different corps of officers who are discontented and unsatisfied, either from a real or supposed injury in their appointments from the different States, should be reconciled, that recruiting may go on with spirit, that there should be an augmentation of our force, and a larger train of artillery.

"Effectually to remedy these evils and oppose the enemy; to put the recruiting service in a favorable train; to establish the artillery and elaboratory upon a proper footing; to check the disaffected, and call out assistance; to give a currency to the continental money, and form the necessary magazines, greater powers must be lodged in the hands of the General than he has even yet exercised. It is impossible in his present situation, and the short time he has to prepare for the ensuing campaign, for him to be in readiness as early as General Howe will take the field, unless you delegate to him full power to take such measures as he may find necessary to promote the establishment of the new army. Time will not admit, nor circumstances allow, of a reference to Congress.

"I can see no evil nor danger to the States in delegating such powers to the General, reserving to yourselves the right of confirming or repealing the measures. The General should have power to appoint officers to enlist at large. This is no time to be particular about proportions or attentive to economy. The measure of our force should be the extent of our funds.

"We have a formidable enemy to oppose whose progress can only be checked by a superior force; and, however disagreeable the reflection, this is a serious truth, that the present existence of the civil depends upon the military power; neither would I advise it at present, but from the fullest conviction of its being absolutely necessary. Remember the policy of the Romans, a people as tenacious of their liberties as any on earth. When their state was invaded, they delegated full powers to exert their whole forces. The fate of war is so uncertain, dependent upon so many contingencies, a day, nay, an hour, is so important in the crisis of public affairs, that it would be folly to wait for relief from the deliberative councils of legislative bodies. The virtue of the people, at such an hour, is not to be trusted; and I can assure you that the General will not exceed his powers, although he may sacrifice the cause. There never was a man that might be more safely trusted, nor a time when there was a louder call. If you intend to support your independence, you must not be too delicate in the choice of means.

"Examples are daily made by General Howe of our friends who fall in his way, while those who are disaffected to our cause are suffered to remain in peace and quiet amongst us. Many who are now well affected will be induced, from the risk and danger on the one side, and the apparent security on the other, to change their sentiments. A discretionary power to punish the disaffected is necessary. The militia has refused to turn out when there has been the greatest want of their assistance, and noth-

ing but such a power can ever compel them. If the refusal of the continental money, and the withholding of the necessary supplies from the army for want of such a power in the General, are to pass unpunished, the one will put it out of our power to pay, and the other to support the troops, and consequently must lay the foundations of all oppositions.

"I am, &c.,

"NATH. GREENE."

If we compare this letter with Washington's letter of the 20th December, we shall find such a harmony of opinions in them as could only have been the result of a free interchange of opinion. If we consider the gravity of the subject, and the cautious character of Washington, we shall see that he would never have entered into such a discussion with any man in whom he did not place the fullest confidence. All of Greene's contemporaries believed, and all historians, till Mr. Bancroft, have written, that this was Washington's relation to Greene. Every document that I have ever seen confirms this view. Mr. Bancroft does not tell us why he paints Greene in colors so irreconcilable with it.

Letters like these need no comment to establish the position of the writer.

## XI. RED CLAY CREEK. WHAT GORDON SAYS, AND WHAT MR. BANCROFT DOES NOT SAY.

In his narrative of the events which preceded the battle of the Brandywine, Gordon wrote (Vol. II. p. 494), "General Greene attended with General Wee-

don was sent to reconnoitre, and find out an eligible spot for the encampment. He pitched upon one at the cross-roads, near six miles distant from the royal army, which he judged suitable, as the Americans would then have an open country behind them, from whence they could draw assistance, and would have opportunities of skirmishing with the enemy before they were organized and provided with teams and horses, &c., for marching; and as Howe's troops would be a long while camped before they could get what was wanting in order to their proceeding. He wrote to the Commander-in-Chief acquainting him with the spot he had chosen; but the information was received too late. A council of war had determined the same day it was transmitted to take a position upon Red Clay Neck, about half between Wilmington and Christiana, alias Christeen, with their left upon Christeen Neck, and their right extending towards Chadd's Ford. When the reason for it, that it would prevent the enemy's passing on for Philadelphia, was assigned to General Greene, he maintained that they would not think of Philadelphia till they had beaten the American army; and upon his observing the position that had been taken, he condemned it as being greatly hazardous, and such as must be abandoned should the enemy when organized advance toward them. The Americans, however, spent much time and labor in strengthening the post." Both time and labor were thrown away, for, as Greene had foretold, they were obliged to retreat the moment the enemy advanced. But as this does not agree with Mr. Bancroft's predetermi-

nation to ascribe a brilliant stroke of generalship to Washington, he passes over it in silence.

## XII. Greene at the Brandywine.

Greene's part in the battle of the Brandywine is told in the following words: "Howe seemed likely to get in the rear of the continental army and complete its overthrow. But at the sound of the cannon on the right, *taking with him Greene and the two brigades of Mühlenberg and Weedon*, which lay nearest the scene of action, Washington marched swiftly to the support of the wing that had been confided to Sullivan, and in about forty minutes met them in full retreat. *His approach checked the pursuit.* Cautiously making a new disposition of his forces, Howe again pushed forward, *driving the party with Greene till* they came upon a strong position, chosen by Washington, which completely commanded the road, and which a regiment of Virginians under Stevens, and another of Pennsylvanians under Stewart, were able to hold till nightfall." (398). Let us see how Gordon tells the story.

"Generals Washington and Greene being together, and hearing the firing, conclude that Sullivan is attacked. Greene immediately hastens his first brigade, commanded by General Weedon, toward the scene of action with such uncommon expedition that in forty and two minutes it advances near four miles. The second brigade is ordered by Washington to march a different route, as it cannot be up in time for service. . . . . Greene, as he approaches the scene of action, perceives that Sullivan's defeat is a

perfect rout. A council of war is held upon the field, and it is agreed that Greene's brigade shall cover the retreat of the flying troops. Greene keeps firing his field-pieces in the rear as he retreats, and continues retreating half a mile till he comes to a narrow pass well secured on right and left by woods. Here he draws up his force, consisting of the Virginia troops and a regiment of Pennsylvanians commanded by Colonel Stewart; and sends his artillery on, that it may be safe in case of his being under the necessity of making a hasty retreat. A warm engagement commences, which lasts from the sun's being three quarters of an hour high till dark. The tenth Virginia regiment, commanded by Colonel Stevens, supports the attack of the British cannonade and musketry for fifteen minutes, though they had never before been engaged. The whole brigade exhibits such a degree of order, firmness, and resolution, and preserves such a countenance in extremely sharp service as would not discredit veterans. Wayne and the North Carolinians, with the artillery and light troops after their defeat by Knyphausen, pass the rear of it in their retreat. At dark that also is withdrawn by General Greene; the extreme fatigue of the royal troops, together with the lateness and darkness of the evening, prevents its being pursued."

According to Mr. Bancroft, "Washington took with him Greene," &c., thus claiming for Washington the rapid march of Weedon's brigade. Mühlenberg's, which Mr. Bancroft does not say, took another road. In advancing this claim he unconsciously advances

also a grave accusation against the Commander-in-Chief, whom he makes rein in his blooded horse to the slow step of a column of infantry, when it was in his power, by taking his way across the fields, to reach the scene of action in a few minutes. The place for Washington at that critical instant was with Sullivan and the broken troops of the right. That this was Washington's own view of his duty appears from the statement of Joseph Brown, who served him as guide. "General Washington's head-quarters," says Mr. Darlington, "were at Benjamin Bing's tavern, about three quarters of a mile east of Chad's Ford. He was there and thereabouts all the forepart of the day of the battle. When he ascertained that the main body of the enemy were at Birmingham Meeting-House, and engaged with our troops, he was anxious to proceed thither by the shortest and speediest route. He found a resident of the neighborhood, named Joseph Brown, and asked him to go as a guide. Brown was an elderly man and extremely loath to undertake that duty. He made many excuses, but the occasion was too urgent for ceremony. One of Washington's suite dismounted from a fine charger, and told Brown if he did not instantly get on his horse, and conduct the General by the nearest and best route to the place of action, he would run him through on the spot. Brown thereupon mounted and steered his course direct towards Birmingham Meeting-House, with all speed, — the General and his attendants being close at his heels. He said the horse leapt all the fences without difficulty, and was followed in like manner by the

others. The head of General Washington's horse, he said, was constantly at the flank of the one on which he was mounted; and the General was constantly repeating to him, '*Push along, old man, — Push along, old man!*' When they reached the road, about half a mile west of Dilworth's town, Brown said the bullets were flying so thick that he felt very uncomfortable; and as Washington now no longer required nor paid attention to his guide, the latter embraced the first opportunity to dismount and make his escape. This anecdote I had from my father, who was well acquainted with Brown, and had ofter heard him relate the adventure." *

Greene's own view of the part he bore in this battle may be gathered from various passages in his letters, of which the following, from a letter of July 5, 1778, to Henry Marchant, delegate from Rhode Island, is the fullest:—"In the action of Brandywine, last campaign, where, I think, both the General and the public were as much indebted to me for saving the army from ruin as they have ever been to any one officer in the course of the war; but I was never mentioned upon the occasion.

"I marched one brigade of my division," — Mr. Bancroft, contradicting Gordon and Greene, says both, — "being upon the left wing, between three and four miles in forty-five minutes. When I came upon the ground I found the whole of the troops routed, and retreating precipitately, and in the most broken and confused manner. I was ordered to cover the retreat, which I effected in such a manner

* W. Darlington, in Proceedings of Hist. Soc. of Penn., Vol. I. pp. 18, 58, 59.

as to save hundreds of our people from falling into the enemy's hands. Almost all the park of artillery had an opportunity to get off which must have fallen into their hands; and the left wing, posted at Shadsford, got off by the seasonable check I gave the enemy. We were engaged an hour and a quarter, and lost upwards of an hundred men killed and wounded. I maintained the ground until dark, and then drew off the men in good order. We had the whole British force to contend with that had just before routed our whole right wing. This brigade was commanded by General Weedon, and, unfortunately for their own interest, happened to be all Virginians. They being the General's countrymen, and I thought to be one of his favorites, prevented his ever mentioning a single circumstance of the affair. . . . . However, as I said before, I trust history will do justice to the reputation of those who have made every sacrifice for the public service."

## XIII. Germantown. "Greene fell under the Frown of the Commander-in-Chief."

We come next to the battle of Germantown. "The plan was," says Mr. Bancroft, "to direct the chief attack upon its right, to which *the approach was easy;* and for that purpose to Greene, in whom of all his generals he most confided, he gave the command of his left wing," p. 424. "Greene should by this time have engaged the British right, but nothing was heard from any part of his wing. . . . . And where was Greene?"

That Greene came on the ground over half an

hour later than Sullivan no one has ever denied. The contemporary explanations of this delay Mr. Bancroft has collected in a note in such a manner as to give them the air of contradiction, and consequent insufficiency. Let us examine them more closely, and see how far one excludes the other. "On account of the darkness of the night, and the badness of some roads," writes Walter Stewart to Gates. It is not unnatural to suppose that under such circumstances they should "have mistaken their way," as General Lacy says they did. Neither of these statements conflicts with Macdougall's explanation, — and he we must remember was in high command on the spot, — "owing to the great distance," any more than Heth's statement to Lamb, that "there was some mismanagement," contradicts Sullivan's to Weare, that Greene's march "was delayed much by his being obliged to countermarch one of his divisions." "Greene's letter to Marchant," says Mr. Bancroft, significantly, "gives no explanation." True; but see what Greene does say: —

"The battle of Germantown has been as little understood as the other by the public at large, especially the conduct of the left wing of the army. Great pains has been taken to misrepresent the transactions of that day. *I trust history will do justice to the reputations of individuals.* I have the satisfaction of an approving conscience, and the confirming voice of as able a general as any we have in service, namely, General McDougall, who knows the report the troops were delayed unnecessarily to be as infamous a falsehood as ever was reported. The troops were carried

on to action as soon as it was possible, and in good order."

That at least part of the road was bad, even Mr. Bancroft — although he had just before asserted that the approach on the right "*was easy*" — bears witness to in the subsequent assertion that Greene "attempted to advance two miles or more through *marshes, thickets, and strong and numerous post and rail fences.*" It is undoubtedly much to be regretted that Greene's report of this battle should not have been preserved; but a large part of all his papers of this period have been lost. That his enemies should have seized upon this occasion to attack him will readily be conceived by all who remember that this was the period when the Conway cabal first began to raise its venomous head, and that every blow which was aimed at Washington was aimed also at Greene as his most trusted counsellor and friend. How these attacks were received Henry Lee tells us: "The left column was under the order of Major-General Greene. Some attempts were made at that time to censure that officer; but they were too feeble to attract notice when levelled at a general whose uniform conduct had already placed him high in the confidence of his chief, and of the army." *

"Greene on that day," continues Mr. Bancroft, "'fell under the frown' of the Commander-in-Chief." Greene, in a letter to Washington of November 24, 1777, says: "In some instances we have been unfortunate. In one I thought I felt the lower of your Excellency's countenance when I am sure I had no

* Lee's Mem., Vol. I. p. 27.

reason to expect it." I am not aware that there is any other authority for referring this expression of a sensitive apprehension to Germantown, although Mr. Bancroft's inverted commas would seem to intimate the existence of some direct and authoritative statement. If so, the Commander-in-Chief must be praised rather for his magnanimity than for his discretion; for within six weeks from this very time, having already distinguished Greene "early in the war," Chief Justice Marshall tells us, "for the solidity of his judgment, and his military talents," he selected him to command, against Cornwallis, England's best general, an expedition which required the highest degree of both.*

## XIV. Who covered the Retreat?

"At about half past eight," continues Mr. Bancroft, Washington, who "in his anxiety exposed himself to the hottest fire," seeing that the day was lost, gave the word to retreat, and sent it to every division. Care was taken for the removal of every piece of artillery. "British officers of the first rank said that no retreat was ever conducted in better order," p. 428. By the juxtaposition of these sentences it seems to be implied that Washington saved the cannon and conducted the retreat. I once more compare Bancroft with Gordon, whose statements he should have held himself bound to disprove before he ventured to reject them.

"Greene, with his own and Stephen's division, happens to form the last column of the retreating Amer-

* Marshall's Washington, Vol. I. p. 179.

icans. Upon coming to two roads, and thinking it will be safest, and may prevent the enemy's advancing by either so as to get ahead of him, and that the divisions may aid each other upon occasion, he marches one division on the one road and the second on the other. While continuing his retreat, Pulaski's cavalry, who are in his rear, being fired upon by the enemy, ride over the second division, and throw them into the utmost disorder, as they know not at first but that they are the British dragoons. The men run and scatter, and the general is apprehensive that he shall lose his artillery. He cannot collect a party sufficient to form a rear guard till he hits upon the device of ordering the men to lay hold of each other's hands. This answers. He collects a number, and by the help of the artillery brings the enemy to give over the pursuit after having continued it near five miles." *

XV. Why Greene was made Quartermaster-General.

"Driven by necessity, Congress won slowly a partial victory over their pride and their fears, and on the second of March they elected Greene quartermaster-general, giving him two assistants that were acceptable to him, and the power of appointing all other officers in his department," p. 469.

Mr. Bancroft might have added, that Greene accepted this office with great reluctance; that he was urged to it by the committee of Congress, and the solicitations of Washington, and yielded only from a sense of duty to his country, and personal devotion

* Gordon, Vol. I. p. 524.

to the Commander-in-Chief. "There is a great difference," he writes Washington on the 24th of August, 1779, "between being raised to an office and descending to one. There is also a great difference between serving where you have a fair prospect of honor and laurels, and where you have no prospect of either, let you discharge your duty ever so well. Nobody ever heard of a quartermaster, as such, or in relating any brilliant expedition. I engaged in this business as well out of compassion to your Excellency as from a regard to the public. I thought your task too great to be Commander-in-Chief and quartermaster at the same time." Surely facts and sentiments like these form a part of the true picture of a great national contest.

## Conclusion.

I have now examined one by one the passages of Mr. Bancroft's volume which relate to General Greene, and compared them with authentic documents. I have shown, —

1. That the assertion that Greene was despondent in 1776 is not only unfounded, but irreconcilably at variance with the general tone of his letters at that period, and even with those upon which the charge is founded.

2. That Greene's account of the affair at Kip's Bay contains no "reflection" upon Washington.

3. That the manner in which the attempt upon Staten Island is related conveys, by the suppression of an important fact, a false idea of Greene.

4. That Greene's letter to Washington upon the evacuation of Fort Independence contains no *murmurs*, and no allusion to the "spirit of his troops"; although Mr. Bancroft by an unfortunate juxtaposition conveys the impression that a phrase which actually occurs in a letter to Mifflin forms part of a letter to Washington. Greene expressly declares that he did not believe Fort Independence could be held.

5. That Greene reported promptly to the Commander-in-Chief every step he took for the reinforcement of Fort Washington. That till the 8th November Washington himself believed that post could be held. That the question of evacuation was referred to Greene on the 8th of November, *because he was on the spot.** That on the 13th Washington by coming *on the spot* became the responsible officer. That if the success of the retreat from Long Island can be taken as a test, the troops might have been removed between the evening of the 13th and the morning of the 16th, when the attack began. And that Stedman, an English officer who wrote a history of high authority, expressly blames Washington for not removing them even after the investment began.

6. That Mr. Bancroft misrepresents Greene by a curious selection of suggestive words, and by changing Greene's own words. Did not *scruple* for did not *hesitate* is an example of the first; any *conceivable* danger for any *great* danger, of the second.

7. That the change of *easy, sanguine disposition* is disproved by Greene's letters.

* "I wrote to General Greene, who had the command on the Jersey shore, directing him to govern himself by circumstances, and to retain or evacuate the post *as he should think best.*" — Washington to President Cong., Nov. 16th, 1776.

8. That the charge of *neglect* of orders is disproved by all the documents.

9. That Greene, having taken the usual means of guarding his post, could not be blamed for relying upon them. That Mr. Bancroft's account of the fall of Fort Lee is contradicted by Washington, Greene, Paine, and Gordon; and in language so precise and distinct as to make it a matter of wonder from whence he could have drawn it.

10. That at Trenton and Princeton Greene was not merely an agent, but a trusted counsellor of Washington.

11. That in the narrative of the movements after Howe's landing at the Head of Elk Greene is injured by omission, although the principal contemporary historian bears full witness to his services.

12. That his part in the battle of the Brandywine is almost ignored, although there is abundant and authentic testimony of the extent and importance of it.

13. That his part in the battle of Germantown is misrepresented, and his great services passed over in silence.

And, lastly, that in relating the fact of Greene's appointment as quartermaster-general Mr. Bancroft has suppressed the fact of Greene's great reluctance to accept that office, and his consenting to it only from a sense of duty, and personal attachment to Washington.

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*Aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante* is the inscription of the temple which grateful France has

consecrated to those who served her with their swords, with their tongues, or with their pens. Illustrious deeds are the legacy of the past, and the seed of the future. From them spring generous emulations, earnest thoughts, noble desires, the self-denial that purifies, and the aspirations that exalt. Woe to the people who, either in the cares or in the pleasures of the present, forget what they owe to the past! Woe to the nation that has no rebuke for the rash hand or the irreverent tongue!

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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